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ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

Fundamental principles of official statistics

Note by the Secretariat

The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), at its forty-seventh session, adopted decision C (47) on the fundamental principles of official statistics in the region of the Economic Commission for Europe (see annex). The decision had been proposed unanimously to the ECE by the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) at its thirty-ninth plenary session in 1991 (ECE/CES/38, paras. 71-74). The Conference was of the opinion that decision C (47) was of universal significance and expressed the wish that the contents of the decision be communicated by the Chairman of the Conference to the United Nations Statistical Commission and to the other regional commissions of the United Nations (ECE/CES/40, para. 10). The Chairman of the Conference wrote to the Chairman of the Statistical Commission requesting that this subject be introduced in the agenda for the twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission. The Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat circulated a copy of the decision in August 1992 to all members of the Statistical Commission, the regional commissions and a number of other international organizations. Those countries and organizations which responded expressed support for similar principles at the global level and supported the proposal that the subject be included in the agenda for the present session.

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* E/CN.3/1993/1.

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Annex

ECE DECISION C (47). FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS IN THE REGION OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE a/

The Economic Commission for Europe,

Bearing in mind that official statistical information is an essential basis for development in the economic, demographic, social and environmental fields and for mutual knowledge and trade among the States and peoples of the region,

Bearing in mind that the essential trust of the public in official statistical information depends to a large extent on respect for the fundamental values and principles which are the basis of any democratic society which seeks to understand itself and to respect the rights of its members,

Bearing in mind that the quality of official statistics, and thus the quality of the information available to the Government, the economy and public depends largely on the cooperation of citizens, enterprises and other respondents in providing appropriate data needed for necessary statistical compilations,

Recalling the general provisions and standards adopted to this end by the European Convention on Human Rights, the Convention of the Council of Europe of 28 January 1991 for the Protection of Individuals with regard to automatic processing of personal data, the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Final Declaration of the Bonn Conference on Economic Cooperation in Europe and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe,

Recalling the efforts of governmental and non-governmental organizations active in statistics to establish standards and concepts to allow comparisons among countries,

Recalling also the International Statistical Institute Declaration of Professional Ethics,

Having taken cognizance of the consensus reached within the Conference of European Statisticians on the need to define the principles governing the activities of the official statistical agencies in the region and in the member States,

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a/ Adopted on 15 April 1992.

Adopts the present resolution:

1. Official statistics provide an indispensable element in the information system of a democratic society, serving the government, the economy and the public with data about the economic, demographic, social and environmental situation. To this end, official statistics that meet the test of practical utility are to be compiled and made available on an impartial basis by official statistical agencies to honour citizens' entitlement to public information.

2. To retain trust in official statistics, the statistical agencies need to decide according to strictly professional considerations, including scientific principles and professional ethics, on the methods and procedures for the collection, processing, storage and presentation of statistical data.

3. To facilitate a correct interpretation of the data, the statistical agencies are to present information according to scientific standards on the sources, methods and procedures of the statistics.

4. The statistical agencies are entitled to comment on erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics.

5. Data for statistical purposes may be drawn from all types of sources, be they statistical surveys or administrative records. Statistical agencies are to choose the source with regard to quality, timeliness, costs and the burden on respondents.

6. Individual data collected by statistical agencies for statistical compilation, whether they refer to natural or legal persons, are to be strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes.

7. The laws, regulations and measures under which the statistical systems operate are to be made public.

8. Coordination among statistical agencies within countries is essential to achieve consistency and efficiency in the statistical system.

9. The use by statistical agencies in each country of international concepts, classifications and methods promotes the consistency and efficiency of statistical systems at all official levels.

10. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation in statistics contributes to the improvement of systems of official statistics in all countries.